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at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HUDYMA (Ukraine)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 80: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (A/49/21, A/49/385, A/49/472)

1. Mr. HOLOHAN (Ireland) (Rapporteur of the Committee on Information), introducing the Report of the Committee on Information (A/49/21), said that the Committee on Information had once again decided by consensus to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of two draft resolutions entitled "Information in service of humanity" and "United Nations public information policies and activities". Draft resolution A dealt with questions of cooperation in the sphere of information, and draft resolution B dealt with the work of the Department of Public Information (DPI) over the following year in a number of key areas.

2. Chief among the mandates which would be entrusted to DPI under draft resolution B would be the continued dissemination of information about United Nations activities aimed at promoting an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations system. Following the establishment of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa, United Nations information efforts in support of the eradication of apartheid should be discontinued.

3. The Bureau of the Committee on Information was happy to note the growing interest in its work, as evidenced in new requests for admission to membership. The draft decision entitled "Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information" would have the General Assembly decide to appoint Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Kazakhstan as members of the Committee. On the basis of consultations undertaken within the Extended Bureau of the Committee on Information, his delegation proposed an amendment to the draft decision contained in paragraph 62 of document A/49/21 which would add South Africa to the list of States appointed to membership of the Committee.

4. The work of the Committee on Information and its cooperation with DPI had been characterized by an atmosphere of mutual understanding and friendship, and he was confident that the Special Political and Decolonization Committee would once again endorse the consensus in support of the draft resolutions.

5. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should consider the amendment submitted by the representative of Ireland to the draft decision contained in paragraph 62 of document A/49/21 when the Committee took action on all the proposals which it was asked to consider under agenda item 80.

6. It was so decided.

7. Mr. SANBAR (Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information) said that the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/49/385) gave an overview of the work of DPI in implementation of General Assembly resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993. Although DPI was officially responsible for disseminating information about the United Nations, in an

intensely competitive communications environment every opportunity had to be seized to advance knowledge about the work and potential of the United Nations, and all members of the United Nations community should participate in that activity.

8. As the Secretary-General had stated on several occasions, the world had entered a new stage in its history. Problems were becoming increasingly global and required multilateral solutions. The United Nations had therefore become a global forum, in a way it had never been before, for dealing with a wide array of such problems; it therefore needed more support than ever before. In pursuit of the concept of mutual interest, DPI had expanded its circle of partnerships, exploring joint ventures with the media, intensifying dialogue with academic communities and forging stronger links with a growing number of non-governmental organizations.

9. DPI had helped to draw up practical public information strategies for the series of international conferences that were laying out development strategies for the coming years. For example, DPI had cooperated closely with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in developing the information component for the recent International Conference on Population and Development, and was currently working to provide similar practical information support to conference secretariats by actively participating in the steering committees for the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development and Fourth World Conference on Women.

10. DPI was developing the closest relationships with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the United Nations University (UNU) and the regional economic commissions. The purpose of that cooperation was to ensure the maximum possible impact with existing resources. The same applied to the relationship between DPI and other Secretariat departments. The Department's cooperation with UNESCO, the aim of which was to promote the emergence of an independent and pluralistic press, had, with the assistance of international professional media organizations and the material support of Governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, enabled the Department to hold seminars in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Caribbean. A similar seminar would be organized by DPI and UNESCO for Arab countries in 1995.

11. In a competitive modern media, speed was the essence of effective communication. During the current year, DPI had entered the so-called information superhighway and was posting material that could be accessed by nearly 30 million users with the potential for millions more. In addition, DPI materials could be accessed on seven other electronic networks, both public and commercial. DPI was also pursuing the development of comprehensive on-line services available to the public, media and delegations.

12. Since international public support was a necessary prerequisite for peace-keeping and humanitarian missions, the number of which was increasing, an effective information and communication component was essential to their success. It was particularly important to target countries that were contributing troops and other resources, and to ensure that the population in countries where peace-keeping missions were deployed fully understood those missions. It was therefore essential that a DPI representative should be included in the survey team dispatched at the conceptual stage, and that a comprehensive information strategy should be viewed as a critical element in ensuring a successful operation.

13. The Department of Public Information viewed radio as one of the most effective media for delivering the message of peace-keeping in the host countries. The Fourth Committee and the Committee on Information at its sixteenth session had called for a strengthening of the role of public information in peace-keeping missions. The Department of Public Information supported a new strategy that would enable it to play a more effective role not only in peace-keeping but also in all other aspects of the Organization's work. The new strategy should be based on a partnership between the Department of Public Information and other Secretariat departments concerned with peace-keeping, political and humanitarian affairs and economic and social development, and should also acknowledge that the Department of Public Information was the focal point and coordinating mechanism for public information activities in the Secretariat.

14. As international media coverage of the United Nations focused almost exclusively on peace-keeping, a significant proportion of the general public had come to believe that development was not a priority United Nations activity. The Department would have considerable difficulty in correcting that perception and persuading the world media that economic and social issues were no less deserving of attention than matters of peace and security. In the current biennium, the Department was using substantial resources to shed light on the role of the United Nations in development and to that end had mobilized to prepare for the cycle of international conferences. The issues to be addressed by the conferences were being publicized in "Development Update", a publication launched in 1994.

15. The Department had completed work on a book to be published in December 1994 on United Nations efforts to counter apartheid from 1948. The Secretary-General had written an extensive introduction and had presented an advance copy to President Nelson Mandela, who had highly commended the new book at a press conference. It was one of a new range of Department publications entitled "United Nations Blue Books Series". Each publication in the series would bring together all the key documents pertaining to a particular United Nations operation in the political, developmental or humanitarian area.

16. The Department of Public Information was making every effort to enhance its professional credibility and the effectiveness of its work. To that end, its staff would have to be fully utilized and mobilized so that they became an integral part of the process. In addition, flexibility would be required from

the offices dealing with finance and personnel, since all units of the Department had to respond immediately to information demands.

17. In the current year, the Department of Public Information had intensified its efforts to develop information products in the Organization's two working languages, English and French. A large volume of material was also prepared in the other official languages with the assistance of the United Nations information centres. In addition, the Department circulated material on various United Nations activities to local and regional target populations, using the widest possible range of languages. The Secretary-General's report entitled "An Agenda for Peace", for example, had been published in 32 languages at very low cost.

18. Effective communication was needed on such issues as development, peace-keeping, democracy, human rights and humanitarian assistance. Interdepartmental and inter-agency consultations were of great importance for the formulation of the Department's information strategies relating to the cycle of United Nations conferences.

19. Progress was also being made in efforts to improve the guided tours operation at Headquarters, which was a unique and effective means of promoting an informed understanding of the work of the United Nations. With the cooperation of the Department of Administration and Management, it was hoped to gain access to the Security Council and Trusteeship Council chambers and to update the exhibits.

20. Operational guidance to United Nations information centres and services was more important than ever before. Over the previous five years, the Department had made great efforts to improve the technological facilities available to the information centres. Only a few of the centres had had computers and printers in 1990. Currently, all information centres had at least one computer system so that it was possible to keep in touch by means of electronic mail and the Internet for fast, cost-effective and convenient transfer of information.

21. The information products of the Department of Public Information included radio programmes disseminated in 15 languages to over 1,800 radio broadcasters throughout the world. Publications were one of the Department's most valuable assets. It was undertaking a review of its publications to make them more current, interesting and substantive and to reflect through them the diversity and vitality of United Nations involvement in every facet of international life. After lagging behind schedule for many years, the Yearbook of the United Nations had been published on time since 1992. With the integration of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the Department had been able to utilize the Library's rich information resources and expand the services provided to the Secretariat, permanent missions, depository libraries, government agencies and other users world wide.

22. Mr. KRAUSE (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed confidence that the Committee would be in a position to endorse fully the results of the sixteenth session of the Committee on Information, held from 9 to

24 May 1994. Freedom of the press and the unhindered flow of information were fundamental prerequisites for achieving the ideals to which the international community aspired, namely the full development of the potential of every human being and democracy and progress in all fields. The European Union fully supported the Declaration of Santiago on Media Development and Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean held by the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Development Programme in Santiago, Chile, from 2 to 6 May 1994. It condemned in the strongest terms any attack against members of the press and paid tribute to those journalists who had died in the performance of their duty.

23. The European Union welcomed the intensive efforts of the Assistant Secretary-General to use the Department of Public Information to further consolidate a unified and credible public image of the United Nations. In that connection, he stressed the significant role of the Committee on Information and drew attention to operative paragraph 1 of draft resolution B contained in document A/49/21.

24. The European Union firmly supported the Secretary-General's policy of integrating United Nations information centres into other United Nations offices whenever feasible. The importance and standing of individual centres depended on the quality and efficiency of their work, especially in view of the increasing interest being shown by Member States in the information activities of the United Nations.

25. The dissemination of information about United Nations peace-keeping operations was of paramount importance to the international community. That applied in particular to countries where peace-keeping operations were being conducted and to troop-contributing countries. It was there that the success and credibility of peace-keeping operations as a whole were decided, since the success of such operations largely depended on the understanding and support of the local population in those countries.

26. Active public relations work must also cover those sectors of the United Nations dealing with social and development issues. The European Union supported the efforts by the Department of Public Information (DPI) to ensure efficient information coverage of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995.

27. The question of promoting world-wide awareness of the United Nations was also linked to the issue of access to the United Nations Secretariat building in New York. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's response to the ideas voiced by the Committee on Information concerning the guided tour arrangements in the Secretariat building. Changes to those arrangements had once again made possible visits to the Security Council Chamber, an important step in satisfying the interest which people from many different countries took in the activities of the United Nations. In conclusion, he noted that, thanks to positive developments in South Africa, DPI was able to redirect its personnel and financial resources to other, more relevant goals.

28. Mr. ZEGHIB (Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, said that the post-cold war era was marked by a number of contradictions. On the one hand, there was a resurgence of conflicts and violence yet, on the other, a number of conflicts were being resolved and there were growing signs of a new age of revitalized international cooperation. A critical stage had been reached, at which the United Nations had the opportunity to bring together its two main areas of activity: security and development.

29. The role of public information in the pursuit of global peace could not be overstated, and it was crucial that the United Nations should be able to give the international community an accurate and objective account of its achievements and problems. Adequate attention must be given to the transfer of information and communication technologies, including to the benefit of the United Nations system, taking into account existing frameworks and avoiding duplication. That area could usefully be set aside for detailed consideration in the General Assembly after Governments had submitted their views to the Secretary-General. He fully supported the freedom of information and expression, and considered that a press free of all undue restrictions played a fundamental role in strengthening democracy and the peaceful coexistence of States. At the same time, he stressed the need for adequate measures to address the imbalances, particularly in the fields of technology and training, which hampered efforts by the developing countries to build their own capacities to provide information and to comment on national, regional and world events.

30. DPI had a number of important tasks before it in the area of social development, including the coverage and promotion of two major events scheduled for 1995, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. With regard to the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, DPI should step up its efforts to develop a strong public awareness campaign to promote the objectives of the Organization.

31. DPI should be given the opportunity to make a substantive input into peace-keeping operations by providing its professional resources and accumulated experience. Vigorous efforts should be made to that end in countries hosting peace-keeping operations and in troop-contributing countries. In that connection, he expressed his appreciation to the Secretary-General for the attention he had given to information issues within the United Nations system and for the positive boost which he intended to give activities in that area.

32. In his delegation's view, attention should be given during the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly to certain specific aspects of the activities of DPI. The first related to the publications of the United Nations: he recalled General Assembly resolution 47/73 B of 14 December 1992, in which DPI had been asked to continue its efforts to ensure timely production and dissemination of its mandated publications, in particular the UN Chronicle, the Yearbook of the United Nations, Development Forum and Africa Recovery. Moreover, it was disturbing to note the marginalization of economic and social development issues, which represented a priority in the Organization's work, while increased attention was being given to issues related to international peace. The second aspect concerned the United Nations information centres: the Group of 77

strongly favoured maintaining and further strengthening the network of information centres and recalled that, in resolution 47/73 B, the General Assembly had reaffirmed the role of the Committee on Information in the prior consideration of any proposal for the opening of new United Nations information centres. With regard to the third aspect, the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Group of 77 supported extending the fruitful cooperation between DPI and UNESCO, particularly with regard to the implementation of its International Programme for the Development of Communication. Welcoming the successful conclusion of the seminar on Media Development and Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Santiago de Chile from 2 to 6 May 1994, his delegation endorsed the proposal to organize a regional seminar for Arab States in 1995.

33. Ms. GRAEPP (Chile), supporting the statement by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77, said that, as previously noted by the Permanent Representative of Chile, the new role which the United Nations was to play in the new world order necessitated broadening the concept of security to include, alongside military and strategic matters and issues of sovereignty, such aspects as the security of individuals, giving priority both to their welfare and to the welfare of their communities as prerequisites for political stability. International conferences and symposiums made a major contribution to the building of awareness in that area, by drawing attention to the urgent need to protect human rights and to secure the equality of women and rights of immigrants and refugees, by assisting in addressing population problems and mobilizing international efforts to eradicate extreme poverty, by creating employment opportunities, particularly for young people, and by eliminating violence. In that context, she particularly commended the work of DPI in keeping the public informed about the results of such forums. A useful initiative in that regard was the holding of regional round tables for journalists.

34. In May 1994, the Seminar on Media Development and Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized by DPI, the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), had been held in Santiago, Chile. That successful Seminar would help fulfil expectations and hopes that had long been thwarted by the cold war. Similar regional seminars had been held in Africa in 1991 and in Asia in 1992, and he hoped that they would soon be held in the Arab States and Europe. The participants in the Santiago Seminar had confirmed that peace, development and democracy were intimately interlinked and had recognized the major role played by the media of the region in favour of peace, development and democracy throughout the world. The Seminar had adopted the Santiago Declaration and Plan of Action, which were contained in document A/49/472. In paragraph 10 of the Declaration, the participants called upon the General Assembly to create a "World Press Freedom Prize", to be awarded annually, to honour individuals, organizations or institutions that had contributed significantly to the advancement of freedom of information, irrespective of the medium, print or electronic. His delegation was currently holding consultations with other delegations with a view to preparing a draft resolution on the subject. He hoped that the General Assembly would take prompt action to adopt an appropriate

resolution that would enable the first award ceremony to be held during the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

35. The CHAIRMAN suggested that those delegations wishing to place their names on the list of speakers for the item under consideration should do so by 6 p.m. on Wednesday, 26 October. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the members of the Committee supported that suggestion.

36. It was so decided.

37. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the deadline for the submission of written views on documents A/C.4/49/2 and A/C.4/49/7 should be 6 p.m. on Thursday, 27 October. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the members of the Committee supported that suggestion.

38. It so was decided.

39. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to documents A/C.4/49/L.5-8 and said that the Committee would take decisions on the draft resolutions on items relating to decolonization on Friday, 28 October. While a number of delegations had requested him to proceed in that manner, other delegations had requested him to postpone decisions on those items. He encouraged interested delegations to hold consultations in order to harmonize their positions on the matter.

40. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) regretted that draft resolution A/C.4/49/L.5 on the question of Western Sahara had been distributed without prior consultation between the sponsors of the draft and his delegation. Unfortunately, the draft resolution did not reflect the views of his delegation and it was clearly aimed at destroying the consensus that had been achieved over the past five years. That was particularly disappointing since there had been recent progress in the implementation of the settlement plan for Western Sahara. He requested the Committee to postpone its decision on the draft resolution, which had been scheduled for Friday, 28 October, to a later date in order to preserve the consensus on the subject and, as a compromise, called upon all interested parties to participate in the drafting of a paragraph concerning the voluntary repatriation of people who had been kept against their will in the Tindouf camp.

41. Mr. LAMAMRA (Algeria) said that his delegation attached great importance to the Committee's consideration of draft resolution A/C.4/49/L.5 on the previously agreed date, namely Friday, 28 October. In his statement, the previous speaker had mentioned the town of Tindouf without specifying that it was situated in Algerian territory. Undoubtedly, the fact that the Government of Morocco had long refused to recognize that Tindouf belonged to Algeria explained why the previous speaker had insinuated that the Government of Algeria was detaining people there against their will. The falsity of that assertion could be confirmed by representatives of various non-governmental organizations and the media, who had considerably more freedom to carry out their activities there than they had in the territory that had been illegally occupied by Morocco. The draft resolution had been discussed at length with all interested delegations. The amendments to the draft that had been distributed by the delegation of

Morocco were not justified and eviscerated the contents of the draft. They had not received the least bit of support. Like other delegations, his delegation was naturally interested in a consensus; however, a consensus was simply impossible when unacceptable demands were being made. It was unlikely that the tenor of the amendments proposed by Morocco would change by Friday, and he proposed that the Committee should not accept Morocco's delaying tactics and take a decision on the matter on Friday, as had been planned.

42. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) said that everyone knew that Tindouf was an Algerian town in which there was a refugee camp. It was also widely known that Morocco had repeatedly requested that UNHCR should be allowed to visit Tindouf in order to obtain first-hand knowledge of the problems experienced by the camp's population and determine who wished to be repatriated. However, there had been no such cooperation. With regard to "territory that had been illegally occupied by Morocco", the Ambassador of Morocco had already said that Morocco was not a colonial Power. The United Nations had never considered Morocco to be a country that had illegally occupied that territory. It was up to the population of Western Morocco to decide whether to remain a part of Morocco or become independent. The amendments proposed by Morocco in no way distorted the contents of the draft resolution. The two principal amendments dealt with the question of a dialogue and its place in the draft resolution, and with the military and administrative problems involved in the implementation of the settlement plan. He regretted that the sponsors of the draft had not considered those amendments together with Morocco. He reiterated his request to hold consultations with a view to reaching a decision through consensus, without having to resort to a vote.

43. Mr. LAMAMRA (Algeria) said that the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.4/49/L.5 had considered all constructive proposals. It was inadmissible for the Committee to postpone action on the draft. With regard to the refugees in Tindouf, he said that the relevant agreement had been signed with UNHCR and that the Secretary-General had visited the region many times. Instead of demonstrating its goodwill, Morocco was hindering the establishment of peace and harmony in the region. His delegation was convinced that the question of Western Sahara would be settled through the conduct of a genuine referendum, and not a sham one, which one party seemed intent on holding. With regard to the reference to a "colonial State", he had had in mind only the illegally occupied territory of Western Sahara, and Morocco's allegation about a completely different issue was proof of its unwillingness to achieve progress towards a solution of the question.

44. The CHAIRMAN said that the general discussion on questions relating to decolonization had been concluded.

45. Mr. ABDERAHMAN (Egypt) proposed that the Chairman should be given an opportunity to hold consultations with the interested parties with a view to achieving a consensus and should report on the outcome of his consultations at the meeting to be held the next morning.

46. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco), referring to the people who were being held in Tindouf against their will, said that he had not been referring to Algeria. With regard to the other issues raised by the representative of Algeria, particularly the question of a referendum, his delegation had complete confidence in the United Nations and the Secretary-General.

47. The CHAIRMAN, responding to the proposals made by the two previous speakers, said that he was willing to hold consultations with the interested parties and report on the outcome of the consultations at the meeting to be held the next morning.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.